

North Carolina Marine Debris Action Plan: 2023 Accomplishments Report

The [North Carolina Marine Debris Action Plan](#) (Action Plan) provides a strategic framework for prevention and removal of marine debris along the North Carolina coast. In 2023, it inspired strategic coordination and direction for the organizations and communities that address marine debris.

- These are highlights captured through work groups. Action Plan partners and many others conducted an impressive amount of work that is not reflected here.



GOAL 1: LEAD AND COORDINATE

Efforts for applying the Action Plan were led by the NC Marine Debris Action Plan Leadership Team.

- The Leadership Team met six times in 2023. Additional subcommittees also met throughout the year to develop and implement projects, as well as facilitate and track the plan's progress.

GOAL 2: PREVENT



Educators at Coastal Carolina Riverwatch, Duke University Marine Lab, NC Aquarium on Roanoke Island, North Carolina Coastal Federation (Coastal Federation), and UNCW Marine Quest collectively educated **4,170 K-12 students and 29,035 adults and families** about marine debris.

The NC Marine Debris Symposium and Coastal Carolina Riverwatch brought together marine debris and plastic pollution stakeholders for three days of collaboration, networking, and solution development.

NC Waterkeepers compiled data from trash trout collections into the [Waterkeepers Carolina Trash Trap Clean Outs: Data Dashboard](#).

UNCW MarineQuest hosted a successful Turtle Trash Collectors Educator workshop funded by the National Marine Sanctuaries Foundation and NOAA Marine Debris program.

- Eighteen turtles were sewn by participants from NC, VA, FL, and TX.



The NC General Assembly began including coastal residential docks in the state's building code to ensure they are built in a way that will make them more resilient to damage during extreme storms.

The General Assembly also approved a measure granting all three towns on Topsail Island authority to adopt ordinances which give the towns jurisdiction over removing abandoned boats from waters within their town limits.

- North Topsail Beach aldermen unanimously adopted an ordinance granting its police department authority to remove abandoned or derelict vessels in navigable waters within the town's jurisdiction.

GOAL 3: REMOVE

Plastic Ocean Project (POP) created its Trees4Trash™ program in 2019. For every 25 pounds of litter removed from the environment, one native tree is planted back.

- In 2023, POP removed **13,624 pounds** of debris with the help of **over 900 volunteers** ranging from individuals and school groups to religious groups and corporate teams.
- In 2024, **545 native trees** will be planted in Fran's Forest, a reforestation site at the New Hanover County Landfill, or distributed to those who have space for them.



GOAL 3: REMOVE (continued)

The Coastal Federation worked on the following removal efforts:

- Completed the ninth year of the Lost Fishing Gear Recovery project **working with 50 commercial watermen and women to remove 2,077 crab pots** from coastal waters, funded by the NC Commercial Fishing License Resource Fund.
- Worked alongside watermen and women, and contractors to **remove 122.39 tons (244,780 pounds) of large-scale marine debris** from coastal waters.
- Coordinated volunteers in removing **3,470 pounds of small-scale debris** during 11 cleanups.



GOAL 4: PREVENT AND REMOVE ABANDONED & DERELICT VESSELS

Removal of Abandoned & Derelict Vessels (ADV) continued in 2023. With nearly 200 removed by the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, 106 by the Coastal Federation, and 42 by local governments and other agencies, **a total of 343 ADVs have been removed since 2019 in NC coastal waterways.**



NC Wildlife Resources Commission will continue to maintain and update the current state-wide ADV database as vessel removal projects are completed and new vessels are reported. The database is updated by utilizing the ArcGIS Online Collector application.

- Data management efforts from the NC Division of Coastal Management and NC Wildlife Resources Commission aims to provide an opportunity for partners to contribute vessel data updates, as well as assess the vessel data for ADV removal work.

GOAL 5: RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT

NC State University and NC Sea Grant produced [educational materials](#) and published a [journal article](#) on their research in the Upper Neuse River to establish links between littered macro and micro plastics in urban areas.

- Research is also underway to identify sources of macroplastics and effective reduction measures in four streams in Cary and Raleigh.



Photo by Gloria Putnam

These logos represent partners who participated in the Leadership Team. Many additional organizations not identified here were engaged in Subcommittees and continue to support the actions of the plan. We welcome others to join the efforts! We cannot do it alone.

Please email sarajh@ccoast.org if interested.

